Muhammad, sallallaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam.

The Perfect Model for Humanity

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In the Name of Allah, The Compassionate, The Merciful

Great and sublime achievements can he manifest in different fields of human action, and so there are great figures in science and philosophy, in public service and generosity, in war, etc. But in whatever field, the greatness of such achievements is founded upon its generating *raison d’être*, just as the strength of the trunk of a tree is founded upon the strength of its roots. And, accordingly, the value, importance and enduring quality of this greatness lie in the potency of its grounds.

We affirm that true greatness is based on many pillars and essentials, of which the most important are these four:

First, the psychological and moral qualities of the individual. Second, the nobility and worth of the fundamental values initiated by the individual, and upon which the individual’s actions were based. Third, the extent of the realization of these fundamental values in actions by the individual. Fourth. the extent of the individual’s success in forming a well-qualified leading generation to shoulder the responsibility for maintaining those fundamentals and continuing to put them into effect.

Certainly, greatness cannot be comprehensive nor full unless it contains all of these four elements. In the pages that follow, we shall show the greatness of our Prophet Muhammad, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, in the light of these essential elements, depending for our demonstration on solid facts and historical evidence.

The First Pillar

As to the first pillar, psychological and personal moral qualities, the authentic biographies of the Prophet teach us that he was the very pattern of excellence, the noblest exemplar. Before he was called to prophethood, he was a peerless example of the good youth, of complete purity. The people of his ow ii tribe called him ‘the Trustw orthy . In a *Jahili* society, he did not drink wine, nor worshipped idols, nor sought amusement in improper ways, Not even those of his tribe who became mortal enemies after lie was called to prophethood. imputed any misconduct to him. He was affectionate to the poor, tender— hearted to the weak, and a supporter of the oppressed. That is why he took part in the *Fudel* pact in which some good people bound themselves to help the weak and oppressed and to recover their rights against abuse by the tyranny of tribal chieftains.

After his prophethood, ‘A’isha, the Mother of the Faithful, may Allah be pleased with her, described him in this way in a sound *hadith: 'His moral was the Qur’an itself’*, meaning that the moral qualities mentioned in the Qur’in and the injunctions revealed by divine command, were all hamionized in his person. ‘A’isha also said that *‘Allah’s Messenger, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, never took revenge for himself unless the things made inviolate by Allah were violated; he then took revenge for Allah."*

After the Angel Gabriel appeared to the Prophet at the cave of Hira and he came home trembling to tell his wife Khadija about what had happened, she said: ‘By Allah, Allah will never disgrace you.

You keep good relations with your kith and kin, serve your guests generously and assist the deserving who have been affected by calamity.'

After these general remarks about the Prophet's personal qualities, we shall now refer to four particular virtues, which no other great person has exhibited all together, especially not those who have enjoyed power.

A- Our Prophet, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, combined in a single personality the highest degrees of spirituality through diligent worship of Allah with the highest degree of industrious struggle and constructive effort for the service of mankind. He excelled in exerting himself to worship Allah and looking forward to the Day of judgement. He was sincere in his desire and diligent to please Allah. He gave charity in the cause of Allah without limit. Also he would stand in night prayer until his feet became swollen, and would fast continually, spending the nights and day s in hunger.

However, he dissuaded his Companions from uninterrupted fasting in this way', lest it prove unbearable to them; he said: *'As for me I spend the night [in a state such] that my Lord feeds me and provides me drink.'* Once, his wife 'A'isha, the Mother of the Faithful, may Allah be pleased with her, asked him about his exertion in worship in spite of the fact that Allah had pardoned him for everything he had sent ahead or left behind. He replied: *"Should I not be a thankful servant"*? And in a sound *hadith*, he says: *"If you knew what I know you would weep much and laugh little."*

Such diligence in worship did not prevent the Prophet, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, from initiating the right action at the proper moment in all manner of administrative, legislative, economic, political and military affairs. The Hijra marked the beginning of the Islamic era, the Muslims were beset with many problems, in addition to their shortage of armed forces, as a result of their forced migration. Nevertheless, the Prophet, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, seized the opportunity to intercept the great annual trade caravan returning from Syria under the leadership of Abu Sufyan. In consequence, the Prophet entered the battle of Badr in which he humbled the umibelievers of the Quray'sh and impressed upon the enemies of the Muslims a new respect and admiration. Later, in the battle of Uhud, victory turned into defeat when a group of archers deserted the position the Prophet had assigned to them, and the Muslims had to return to Madina greatly weakened. The Prophet, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, immediately prepared to enter upon a new battle, accompanied by only those who were with him at Uhud, to renew respect for the Muslims in the minds of the unbelievers. Their enemies were afraid and marched off toward Makka. Thereupon, the Muslims went back, led by the Prophet, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, to Madina, their morale which had been damaged by defeat thus restored and having learnt an invaluable lesson for their future military affairs.

B- Humility, modesty and altruism are among the rarest of personal attributes among the great and eminent if they also enjoy supreme authority. The Prophet, despite the high solemnity of his state and the freely given reverence of his Companions, shunned all torms of pomp and appearances of pride such as, typically, characterize rulers, heads of state, and holders of high office.

The Prophet, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, and his followers were the same in outward manner, in dress. in their attitude when seated, even in the physical work they undertook. For example, in the battle of the Trench, they personally took part in the digging and carrying. When travelling, the Prophet used to gather firewood to help his followers in preparing food, and he was so

like any one of them that newcomers were unable to distinguish him among his followers in the mosque. Thus, it was normal to ask the question. 'Which of you is Muhammad'?' whereupon the Companions would point to the Prophet.

Of his modesty, a sound *hadith* reported by Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri, may Allah be pleased with him, records: *"The Messenger of Allah, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, was more modest than the virgin behind the curtain [or in the apartment]."*

Out of selflessness and concern for others the Prophet spent freely from his income from moneys, spoils of war, and gifts to himself, leaving literally next to nothing for his family. It is recorded that whenever he was given a vessel of milk as a gift, he would call the poorest of the Muslims, the 'sitters on the bench', to drink and he himself drank the remainder after them.

It as related from 'A'isha, may Allah be pleased with her, that she said: "Never did the family of Muhammad, upon him be peace, eat their full of Harley-bread for three successive days.'

According to al-Bukhari and Muslim, the Prophet died in such a condition that his armour was pledged to a Jew.

The moral qualities of self-discipline and denial for others' sake, is lacking among rulers and presidents who are accustomed — even in the so-called democratic and socialist regimes of our age —to taking exclusive possession of houses and means of transport and all other conveniences, as well as to piling up wealth by exploiting their positions of authority.

C- The Prophet's submission to right is the third of his unique traits. Addressing Umar bin al-Khattab, may Allah be pleased with him, who wanted to deal forcefully with a Jew who had come to the Prophet, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, then in straitened circumstances, to demand payment of a debt, and had done so harshly, the Prophet said: *'Let him be. for the creditor has the right to speak harshly.'*

The Prophet's unequalled forbearance, a quality especially rare among those who wield power, towards those who are uneducated and rude, is another demonstration of his submission to right. The incident is well-known of a bedouin who came to the Prophet and asked him for a gift (of money), and pulled at the Prophet's collar until it chafed his neck. The Prophet showed extraordinary forbearance in responding to the bedouin and gave him what he asked despite his ill-manners.

D- The Prophet's ideal life was characterized by full adherence in practice to the high moral standards he taught. There were no gaps between his words and his deeds.

Thus, he did not break an agreement with any of his enemies nor acted treacherously even if he feared treachery from them, nor did he engage in falsehood to obtain a victory in any of his battles. The sound hadith — 'War is a stratagem' does not by any means indicate an exception to this moral standard in politics. It indicates the permission in the actual business of battle, to disguise from an enemy such information as the size of one's force or their deployment - for example, to marshal ranks for a battle in such a way as to show massive numbers or to make a din so that the enemy tears the imminent arrival of large reinforcements. An actual instance of this noble stratagem is how the Prophet, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, would lead his forces in a direction different from his intended destination, in order to conceal that information from the enemy. That is

no more than sound practical wisdom and security, and not a violation of high moral standards in politics and tactics.

An admirable tradition narrates this incident from the life of the Prophet. A polytheist, ‘Abdullah bin Sa’d bin Abi Sarh, apostatized after embracing Islam and defamed the Prophet, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him. The Prophet ordered the Muslims, accordingly, after the conquest of Makka, to execute him. But he, ‘Abdullah, took refuge with ‘Uthman bin ‘Affan, his foster brother, may Allah be pleased with him, who took him to swear allegiance to the Prophet. The Prophet three times refused this allegiance, but then accepted it. After ‘Abdullah had departed, the Prophet, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, said: *"Was there not among you any man who rose to kill him (i.e. ‘Abdullah) when I refused his allegiance?"* They said: ‘Oh, Prophet of Allah! Why did you not make a sign?’ The Prophet said: *"Prophets should not use tricks that deceive with the eyes."*

The Second Pillar

In connection with the second pillar, namely, the nobility and worth of the fundamental values initiated by the great individual and upon which his actions were based, the achievements of the Messenger of Allah. may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him. surpass by far what any other human being was given to achieve. He established enduring values in personal, social and political life, and founded these values in a noble and practicable system, which has secured success in all areas of life in conformity with human nature. Moreover, he established these great and enduring reforms in a society empty of any understanding of the values he sought to realize, and he succeeded against a background of fierce resistance and hostility.

We can express his achievement briefly by affirming that the Prophet, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, introduced a system that not only combines practice with ideals but also adjusts and harmonizes the ideals in an unprecedented way. It is a system that does not exclude or reject, but one that blends, contrasting elements of life. It does not reject any of the opposing sides of human nature because each of them is a beneficial force if put in its right place.

Human life, especially collective or social life, made up of good and bad, of well-doers and evil-doers, is indeed in need of these contrasting elements. Just as a plant needs heat and cold, dryness and rain, so human life needs both mercy and rigour. gentleness and hardness, letting go and holding down, relaxation and labour, peace and war, modesty and pride, giving choice and imposing constraint, soft-voiced exhortation and strong criticism, and so on.

True virtue — in the individual or society or in government rests on right use of all the contrasting elements of human nature in the right time and place. It is not to be found in any exclusive preference for one element while neglecting the others. Indeed, reliance upon any one of these contrasting elements leads human life to the point where its quality begins to fall off unless the opposing element is also brought into use — continual indulgence spoils the appetite and the person, continual clemency encourages rebellion, continually condoning crime urges on more crime; unlimited appeasement arouses the enemy to ever more tyranny. and so on.

The Prophet, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him. was distinguished in human history because, through his prophethood and his teaching, expressed in the *Shari'a*, he combined the ideal with the practical in an unprecedented way and did so with wisdom, fitting each to the needs of life

so that moral ailment were cured and shortcomings corrected. We may illustrate this right harmony and wise exploitation of the whole potential of human beings through the following examples:

The Prophet instructed us to be merciful, and generalized this mercy to cover also all sentient creatures. He promised a great reward for looking after animals: '*There is a reward for service to every living animal.'* He prohibited verbal or other abuse or tormenting of a person under sentence of death: similarly, he prohibited torturing of an animal before or during slaughter: *"if you execute, execute well: and if you slaughter, slaughter well."* Another *hadith* records: *"A woman was punished because she had kept a cat tied up until it died and as a punishment for this offence 1 she was throw n into Hell. She had not provided the cat with food or drink, and had not freed the cat so that she could eat the insects of the earth."* The Prophet's own tenderness and care is illustrated in the observation that he used to incline the bowl to enable the cat to drink more comfortably.

But in spite of this extreme gentleness, in the right place and at the right time, he stipulated severe retribution for offenders and criminals.

The Prophet, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, also prescribed peace and goodwill between nations as well as individuals, encouraged their knowing each other and co-operating in noble objectives. Allah says in the Qur'an:

''O Mankind! We created you from a single [pair] of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another. Truly the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous among you'' (49: 13)

And Allah also says:

''But if the enemy incline towards peace, do thou [also] incline towards peace'' (8: 61)

As well as this exhortation to peacefulness, the *Shari'a* urges military action against those who are engaged in plots against Islam. The Qur'an orders the believers to spare no pains in the preparation to resist such plotters:

''Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power. including steeds of war, to strike terror into [the hearts of] the enemies of Allah and your enemies'' (8: 60)

The Prophet, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, enjoined humility among Muslim brothers, saying: *''He who behaves humbly and modestly, Allah will elevate him.''* On the other hand, he practiced showing superiority before an enemy in combat. The Qur'an confirms that:

''Soon will Allah produce a people whom He will love as the will love Him lowly with the believers, mighty against the rejecters'' (5: 54)

And the Prophet, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, said: *'He who shows servility willingly not forced — is not of us.'*

The Messenger, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, recommended forgiving offences related to individual, personal rights according to the words of the Qur'an:

''But if a person forgives and makes reconciliation, his reward is due from Allah.'' (42: 40)

On the other hand, he stressed firmly collective rights and refused remission or intercession in connection with the rights of Allah and with the full execution of His restrictive ordinances.

These are but a few examples from an abundance of others that indicate the scope of the *Shari'a* which accords due scope to the contrasting elements in human life. The life of the righteous person and of the righteous community does not neglect any one of these elements because, in the realm of the outward, these elements are necessary to each other — different facets of the balanced, rational whole. If a man knows but one facet and fails to discover the other side of it, his knowledge is deficient and his understanding misdirected.

It is a part of the doctrine of Islam that the *Shari'a* was an integral aspect of the revelation from Allah to His Messenger, that it was not determined by the Messenger himself. Indeed, the Prophet, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, never spoke from his own desires when he taught the precepts of the *Shari'a*. Moreover, some of these rules of the *Shari'a* derive directly from the text of the Qur'an and not from the *Sunna* of the Prophet.

How far, then, can the virtues of the *Shari'a* be said to be an indication of the greatness of the Messenger? We would answer that they indicate his greatness not in respect of the origin of the Law, but in respect of its realization and application by the Prophet. Not only as the man, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, worthy to receive the Revelation and the Law but to embody it and establish it. There is, by the blessing of Allah, a perfect match between the balance of contrary elements within the *Shari'a* on the one hand and, on the other, the same balance in the actions, attitudes and precepts of the Messenger. His life, seen in the round, presents a living harmony of all the best human qualities - the fact of harmony between these qualities itself being the highest excellence - lightness as well as seriousness, flexibility as well as rigour, strictness as well as compassion, humility as well as self-respect, enjoyment as well as self-discipline, amiability as well as implacability, speed of decision as well as deliberateness, anger as well as forbearance, to name only some of the virtues so well illustrated in what has come down to us in the records of his life, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him.

It goes without saying that the Prophet, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, used to joke on some occasions though he said nothing except the truth. An example of this is his saying to an old woman: *'An old woman will not enter paradise'* whom he then consoled by smiling and adding that all old women should be young in paradise, that Allah would resurrect them as young women on the Last Day.

The Prophet, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, is also known to have bantered with children in order to amuse and delight them. Thus, he would bend down so that his grandsons. Al-Hasan and Al-Husain could ride on his hack, and he said: *'How excellent a camel is yours! And how excellent a pair of loads are you!'*

On the other hand, while he described his grandsons as his *'basil'* (his delight) in this world, the Prophet took a date out from Al-Hasan's or Al-Husain's mouth because it had come from the *zakat* (alms—tax), which is not allowed to the Prophet, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, or to any in his household.

The Prophet, ma peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, was the most merciful of people as stressed in the Qur'anic verse which describes him in the words:

A sound *hadith* records: *"Allah will have mercy upon those who are merciful; be clement towards those who are on the earth so that the One in Heaven will have compassion for you."*

In another *hadith*, Ibn Mas‘ud, may Allah be pleased with him, said: ‘We were on a journey with Allah's Messenger, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, and we saw a lark along with two nestlings, so we took its young. Then the lark came by fluttering its wings [i.e. agitated]. Thereupon, the Prophet said: *"Who has afflicted this [lark] on account of its nestlings? Give them back"*.

It is reported in the collections of Al-Bukhari and Muslim that the Messenger, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, said: *‘There was a dog moving around a well whom thirst would have killed. Suddenly a prostitute from the prostitutes of Bani Isra’il happened to see it and she drew water in her shoe and let it drink, and she was pardoned because oh this.’*

The Prophet’s mercy, kindness and soft-heartedness were balanced by firmness and implacability in affairs where these virtues were appropriate. This is why he not only fought against all the recalcitrant enemies of the call to Islam, but also remained firm in the face of their sustained and armed hostility, while forgiving those of them whom he thought forgiveness might correct.

It is reported by ‘Ali, may Allah he pleased with him, that when fighting became intense, the Prophet, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, was seen in positions nearest to the enemy.

The Prophet, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, disapproved the intercession of his Companions. may Allah be pleased with all of them, for a noble woman of Bani Makhzum who had committed theft. He said on that occasion the well-known, everlasting words: *‘O people, those who have gone before you were destroyed because, if anyone of high rank committed theft amongst them, they spared him; and if anyone of low rank committed theft, they inflicted the prescribed punishment upon him. By Allah, if Fatima, the daughter of Muhammad, were to steal, I would have her hand cut off.’*

‘A’isha, the Mother of the Faithful, may Allah be pleased with her, said that Allah’s Messenger, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, never struck anyone with his hand, neither a woman nor a servant, but only in the case when he had been fighting in the way of Allah and he never took revenge for anything unless the things made inviolable by Allah were made violable, he then took revenge for Allah, the Exalted and Glorious.'

A. The Prophet, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, combined full reliance upon Allah with full observance of all ordinary practical means to manage security. That is the true meaning of reliance in the *Shari'a* and distinct from negligence, or indolence, in the safeguarding of human affairs.

In his *Hijra* (emigration) the Prophet, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, made use of every means of secrecy, hiding and camouflage to mislead the enemies who were pursuing him and meant to kill him before he could reach Madina. At the same time, he entrusted himself wholly to Allah, the Exalted and Great, imploring His help to achieve success and to remove possible hindrances.

On the occasion of the battle of Uhud, the Prophet, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, wore a double suit of armour for better protection against the enemy's weapons. And there is his well-known response: *'Tie up [your camel] and then trust un Allah '*, to the man who asked if he should leave his she-camel unfettered and rely only on Allah to prevent it straying; that response perfectly balances the outward and the inward, the active and the contemplative, the harmony of effort for this life and the life hereafter. In that harmony lies the true spirit and tone of the *Shari'a*, which is not a remote or idealistic dream but which, in the recorded detail of the life of the Prophet,

may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, becomes a living reality.

The Third Pillar

The third pillar or essential for judging human greatness relates to the translation into effect of great ideas and precepts, their realization. In the case of the Prophet Muhammad, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, the greatness of the teaching was wholly validated by the greatness of its effects in the real world — hearts and minds of strong aversion became disciples of the most perfect ardour for the cause of Islam. Yet, to fully appreciate this achievement, one needs to remember the environment, physical, cultural, moral, in which the call of Islam was first raised.

The call to Islam was met with violent resistance, and fierce derision and contempt directed at the Messenger. may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him. With great resolution, and following the commands of Allah, the Prophet turned from his own tribe and native city to a people associated, in the name of Islam, in a new city called Madina. There he established a new force, structured and directed by the principles of Islam, and was eventually able to return to his native city in strength and victory. In this way, the peninsula of Arabia changed from being the focus of idolatry, corruption and barbarism, to being the centre of the most radiant, pure monotheism, and a springboard for the enlightened and humane civilization of Islam.

We give here a bare handful of examples of what the Prophet, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, did in the cause of laying the foundations of a new civilization based upon justice and universal human brotherhood.

By virtue of the call to Islam the Prophet, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, the physical and cultural environment of the Arabs was purified of the idols that they had blindly worshipped in the past. Superstitiousness and obscurantism were demolished and in their place the Prophet established the principal teachings of Islam. Firstly, belief in One God, Allah, the Creator, the Eternal and Absolute, the Exalted and Majestic, the Omnipotent and the Omniscient, Who neither begot nor was begotten, without partner or associate or any form resembling Him, whether inward or outward. Through the verses of the revealed Qur'an and the related teaching of the Prophet, this essential principle was communicated to the heart and mind of reasoning, reflecting man.

Secondly, belief in the Last Day, the Day of Reckoning, and in Allah's Messengers and the Books revealed to them. In this way the worth of all human beings, their unity under the One Creator, and their common answerability to Him, were offered as the persuasive, powerful answer to polytheism and paganism. Thus the Arab mind was freed and the Arabs were enabled, in an extraordinarily short time, to establish the Islamic civilization which spread throughout the world.

B. The Prophet, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, set up a new Islamic order to give expression to new social concepts and criteria which disregard the attachments of blood-line or tribe. The new values were fearfulness of Allah, faith and merit; sympathy and care, personal love and social justice were directed beyond the immediate family, tribe or clan towards mankind in general, and all people were treated as essentially equal before right and law.

The Messenger, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, commissioned Zaid bin Haritha, a freed slave, to lead the Islamic army in the *Ghazwa* of Mu'ta (in what is now Jordan) against the Romans. The expedition was a very major one due to the distance and the hardship of the journey. The appointment of Zaid bin Haritha marked a radical change from the earlier non-Islamic tradition: both Ja'far bin Abi Talib, cousin of Allah's Messenger and a chief of the tribes of Quraysh, and Khalid bin Al-Walid Al-Makhzumi, served under the command of a freed slave.

Later, the Prophet, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, also entrusted Usama bin Zaid bin Haritha, a young man, to lead the army in the second *Ghazwa* to Mu'ta, even though many senior Companions of the Prophet such as 'Umar bin Al-Khattab, may Allah be pleased with him, were in the army and available. The death of the Prophet, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, delayed the expedition of Usama's army to Mu'ta. The first task of the first Caliph, Abu Bakr, was to send out that force, as the Prophet had intended. Abu Bakr went out on foot to the edge of al-Madinah al-Munawwarah to see off the army: at the head of that army, its young leader, at the insistence of the Caliph, remained on his mount.

Another example is that of Salman al-Farsi, who was the slave of a Jew until the Prophet, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, helped to secure his freedom. Subsequently, the second Caliph, 'Umar bin Al-Khattab, appointed Salman al-Farsi, may Allah be pleased with them both, to the post of Amir of Madaen of Chosroes.

These actions of the Prophet changed the Arab conventions and concepts associated with tribalism. They embodied practically the teaching of the Qur'anic verse —

''Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of God is (he who is) the most righteous of you'' (49: 13);

and of the *hadhih*: *'Whoever appoints a man as commander of his band, while there is among them another more pleasing to Allah (i.e. more obedient to His orders), the one (who appoints) is considered disloyal to Allah, to His Messenger and to the believers.'* The Prophet, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, said: *'Any person whom Allah has given charge of people and who dies while acting dishonestly towards his people will be excluded from paradise by Allah.'* Is there a worse way for a ruler to cheat his subjects than by appointing someone who is less righteous and less competent to handle the public interests than another?

C. The Prophet, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, changed the social conditions and position of women — these were among the most dramatic improvements in the ancient, established practice of the *jahiliyya* Arabs. Before Islam, women — with rare exceptions — were considered as a part of the personal effects of their menfolk and did not enjoy any kind of legal rights. Until the Qur'an and *Sunna* improved matters, no society had, either in Law or in practice, recognized the rights and dignities of women in the same spirit as it recognized the rights of men. Islam affirmed the worth of women as believers with equality before Allah while affirming also their

differences from men in their roles as mothers, wives, daughters. In an age of blind prejudice and adherence to customary practice, at a time when female babies were often buried alive, the changes instituted by the Prophet, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, were a miracle.

D. The Prophet. may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, set up the first Islamic state on new foundations, with a central treasury and a number of different departments concerned with administration, defence, education, the economy, welfare and so on. At the same time these different departments worked flexibly and harmoniously according to the *Shari'a* to bring about a civilization that was truly Islamic.

E. The Prophet, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, praised all branches of knowledge, especially that of the Shari'a. He likened knowledge of *Shari'a* to the light of the crescent moon which shows the way to an orderly and righteous human life. In addition, the Prophet raised the standing of scholars and urged Muslims to teach and learn. He praised the spreading of knowledge and forbade the hiding of it, indeed he threatened a punishment for hiding knowledge. This enthusiasm for learning was soon to enlighten the world and flower in the arts and sciences, the universities and botanical gardens, from which all mankind has been benefiting ever since.

The brief comments and reflections above are no more than the broadest overview to remind the reader of the ability granted to the Prophet, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, not only to announce a programme of reform but also to carry it out, to so firmly establish it that its benefits could not be reversed.

So many enlightened calls to reform have failed because they were not accompanied by a comparable genius for putting them into effect. Typically, even the wisest and best-intentioned reformers have run into opposition from individuals or groups whose vested interests were threatened by the reform: before the reforms could be sufficiently implemented, their purpose was subverted by the opponents of the reforms. Islam was not, of course, merely a package of reforms: it involved a whole renewal of inward and outward life, of individual and collective action. That the Prophet, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, succeeded fully in instituting such sweeping and comprehensive changes in the social means and relations operating in the *jahiliyya* society of Arabia is a measure of the man's unique greatness. No small part of that success was the transformation of the best of a whole generation of individual men and women into Muslims of the highest excellence — who, in turn, passed the message on in the form of an excellent, practical example.

The Fourth Pillar

That preparation of a generation of men and women to fully understand and transmit the message is a decisive, conclusive proof of the greatness of the Prophet Muhammad, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him. For without such a generation of men and women imbued with zeal to carry the faith to others, with the breadth of mind to temper that zeal flexibly enough to convince people living in different ages and different places, and with sufficient depth of conviction to hold to the essentials of the faith in whatever circumstances — without such a generation, it is doubtful if the great civilization of Islam could have occurred at all, let alone travelled across the whole world while still retaining its distinctive, unifying characteristics. It is true that, to some extent, every major

reform in human history has been associated with a great individual and the immediate group of his followers or disciples. But in all cases except one, the message has become changed, blurred, corrupted, its original language lost, its original meaning so varied from age to age and culture to culture, that hardly anyone would claim to be sure what that meaning was. The one exception is Islam, the message conveyed by the Prophet Muhammad, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, and continually preached and practised by his followers ever since.

They would not have been able to do so had the Prophet not educated that first generation so well in the commitment to *da'wa*, to calling others to Islam. It is most important to remember that we are not speaking of a small core of people, a chosen few or priestly elite, but a whole generation of men and women from all levels and walks of life, slaves as well as masters, blacks as well as whites, non-Arabs as well as Arabs, merchants as well as warriors and scholars, and women as well as men. The call of Islam penetrated to every and all aspects of human attitude and conduct, so it was but natural that the call should have been raised by the broadest range of believing men and believing women.

Two achievements of the Companions, may Allah be pleased with them all, which are particularly striking are (i) their efforts to preserve and collect the Qur'an, both in their memories and in the form of a book during the rule of the first two caliphs (and by their followers ever since) and (ii) their efforts to memorize, report, record and study the *Sunna* and the sayings (*ahadith*) of the Prophet, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him. Neither achievement is conceivable without their quality of faith and their quality of love for the person of the Prophet: they remembered his words and deeds because, as he had himself explained, that was the best way to remember how to embody the teachings of the Qur'an.

The history of Islam during its age of expansion and prosperity in Africa, Europe and Asia as far as China, is full of examples of how the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunna could be realized in a rich, diverse and tolerant civilization which excelled in the arts and sciences as well as in government and administration and the provision of justice and welfare. It is natural that Islam should have expressed itself as a civilization and not, narrowly, as a faith, because the essentials of its creed appeal to human reason, and because the duties of observance demand the exercise of both faith and reason, and because, through the *Shari'a*, the law of Islam, justice becomes a major goal of the Muslims' collective effort as believers.

For the civilization of Islam to be established it was, as we have said, necessary that a whole generation should be educated according to the spirit and teachings of the true *deen*, different men and women in all different walks of life. The building up of such a generation is no small part of the achievement of the Prophet, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him. A major foundation in that building up was a commitment to the work of *da'wa*, the carrying of Islam into the lives and hearts and minds of others, and its corollary, a commitment to *jihad*, in the cause of *da'wa*. On the rewards of inviting others to Islam, the Prophet said, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him: *'If one individual embraces Islam at your hands, that will be better for you than the red camels (i.e. than your dearest possessions or attachments in this world).'* The emphasis on 'one individual' is significant, underlining another *hadith* which explains the responsibility of guardians or those in charge of others for the education of those in their care: *'All of you are guardians and responsible for your wards and the things under your care.'*

This principle, that all Muslims have responsibilities for Islam in all its dimensions, derives from the Qur'anic injunction, addressed to all Muslims men and women, that they should enjoin the right and forbid the wrong. The work of *da'wa* is laid upon all Muslims and constitutes one of the prime duties of the diligent Muslim to his fellow men.

As for the love for *jihad* and continuous readiness for it, the Prophet, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, was assiduous in encouraging it in his followers. He did so because the love for *jihad* is not only the protective armour of Islam, it is

also the means by which the freedom to do the work of *da'wa* can be protected. That freedom is essential for mankind: Islam is from Allah, a mercy for the peoples, and it is Allah's last and final message for them — its way should not, and indeed must not, be blocked, according to the verse, ***'There is no compulsion in religion'*** (2: 256). Should the work of *da'wa* be prevented, the forces of wickedness in the age — and there are always such forces — will seek to destroy the faith altogether.

The *Sunna* of the Prophet, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, and the Qur'an itself, concentrate on the high value to be placed on da'wa and *jihad*. Thus the Prophet's Companions, may Allah be pleased with them, longed for the *jihad* and its rewards in the Hereafter, and were grieved at the prospect of being denied martyrdom or death in *jihad*. The Prophet said: *'Jihad is carried on till the Day of Resurrection.'* After faith itself, *jihad* is accorded the second degree among the great obligations of Muslims, and so the rewards for the *mujahids* are among the highest degree. The Prophet used to pray to Allah for 'the life of the happy and the abode [or rank] of martyrs.' It is on account of the martyrs for Islam that there are now in the world so many hundreds of millions of Muslims.

Essentials of Forming a Leading Generation

Without doubt, then, the greatest single achievement of the Prophet, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, is to secure that long and successful continuance of Islam by educating a whole generation of men and women to establish it so firmly. To succeed in this activity of education, he needed the best insight and wisdom, and knowledge of the dispositions and manners of particular individuals. He needed a keen sense of circumstance and situation to choose the best moment to begin or pursue the education. He needed an extraordinarily accurate assessment of the present and potential ability of a great many individuals in many departments of life and their likely response to victory and defeat. Finally, he needed to combine a personal persuasiveness with a weighty argument and power to convince through precept and practice — only the combination of these could realize what was realized in the Companions of the Prophet, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, namely, a willingness to live and die for the cause of Islam.

Three important features of the Prophet's teachings are especially worth noting.

Firstly, he placed due emphasis on individual education and did not restrict himself to general, collective guidance. Reform of the individual was the essential foundation for reform of the community: virtue and right guidance spread outward from each virtuous and right-guided individual to influence the community which in its turn, offers the best environment for other individuals to realize their potential for virtue and right guidance. Secondly, the Prophet, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, picked the moment when, as well as the person whom, he would

seek to improve. If there is inward readiness for it, acquisition of knowledge is easier, more enduring and more fruitful. In the same way as watering a thirsty land is more profitable than pouring the same water on impermeable rocks, so attention needs to be paid to the occasions and circumstances in which guidance is presented.

Consider this example: the Messenger, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, saw an able-bodied man asking for alms in the mosque. He asked the man: ‘What do you have at home?’ The man replied: ‘A carpet. It serves as a quilt and mattress. And a wooden tumbler for drinking.’ The Messenger commanded the man to bring these and when he had done so, auctioned them for two dirhams. Then, the Messenger commanded the man to get food for his family with one dirham, and an axe with the other for cutting wood, and to return after fifteen days. During those fifteen days the man cut and sold wood and was able to achieve a surplus of a dirham a day over and above the expenses of all members of his family. At this moment, the Messenger, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, drew the lesson for the man: *‘This is better for you than to come on the Day of Resurrection with a black mark on your face (from begging).’*

As well as teaching the right person at the right moment to the right degree, the Prophet, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, encouraged consistency and regularity in good acts. A strenuous act of virtue soon disappears as a gesture, whereas a little good done regularly bring greater benefit for longer. That is surely the meaning of the authentic *hadith*: *‘The acts most pleasing to Allah are those which are done regularly, even if they amount to little.’* Sustained good deeds have an assured, solid increase — just as drops of water may accumulate into a river or ocean.

Michael Hart, an American historian and mathematician, recently published The Hundred Greatest Men in History. He places the Prophet Muhammad, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, at the head of his list as the most influential of all men. His study does not reflect upon the virtue or otherwise of the personages he mentions, measuring only the extent of their influence. We have tried, in this brief paper, to establish the virtue and greatness of the Prophet’s life, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, by examining the inherent qualities of that life and not simply its influence. Indeed, there has been no human life the equal of his by any measure of value or influence. In him were gathered all the qualities of human excellence, harmonized so as to make for mankind the perfect exemplar, leaving aside his greatness in being the summation and seal of all the Messengers of Allah.

A conqueror is renowned for his conquests; an inventor for his inventions and his inventiveness; a scholar for the extent and depth of his erudition; a philanthropist for the wisdom and size of his public gifts; an orator for his gift of eloquent speech. But in each case, the very greatness of the individual quality has so often meant excess, immoderation leading to error and loss. Or this one excellence has been combined with the gravest failings in other areas — thus, a great orator may yet be a terrible coward; the great conqueror may also be a miser, and so on. Finally, the great one may by his greatness become remote, unfamiliar in all qualities other than that in which he excels. But the life of the Prophet Muhammad, the last of Allah’s Messengers, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, remains known to us in the smallest detail. There is therefore an intimacy of love among Muslims for each and all of his qualities that will not diminish till the end of time. He remains the perfect model, fresh in every Muslim heart, of the devout and trustworthy youth, the most honest of traders, the most reliable friend, the perfect husband, the most loving father, the wisest leader and commander of men in peace and war, the greatest and most merciful of men to the

needy, the weak, those far from home, the most just of judges, and the truest and most steadfast in worship, with the purest devotion to the One God, and He knows best with whom to place His last message.

Praise be to Allah, Lord of all the worlds.